

**MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
HEPATITIS A INFORMATION SHEET**

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A (formerly known as infectious hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by a virus.

Who can get Hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but it occurs more frequently in children.

How is the virus spread?

The hepatitis A virus enters through the mouth, multiplies in the body and is passed in the feces. The virus can be carried on an infected person's hands and can be spread by direct contact, or by consuming food or drink that has been handled by the individual. In some cases, it can be spread by consuming water contaminated with improperly treated sewage.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

The symptoms of hepatitis A may include fatigue, poor appetite, fever and vomiting. Urine may become dark in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and white of the eyes) may appear. The disease is rarely fatal and most people recover in a few weeks without any complications. Infants and young children tend to have very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults. Not everyone who is infected will have all of the symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear two to six weeks after exposure, but usually within three to four weeks.

For how long is an infected person able to spread the virus?

The contagious period begins about a week or so before the symptoms appear, and extends up to the time of jaundice.

Does past infection with Hepatitis A make a person immune?

Once an individual recovers from hepatitis A, he or she is immune for life and does not continue to carry the virus.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

To prevent person-to-person spread, careful hand washing after visiting the toilet is the single most important means of prevention. For close contacts of a case, immune globulin shots are recommended to minimize the risk of disease. Long term protection requires vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine.

Persons who have Hepatitis A should:

- get plenty of rest
- drink plenty of fluids
- avoid alcoholic beverages
- wash their hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the toilet

Persons who have Hepatitis A should not:

- share towels, wash cloths or soap
- share eating utensils or drinking cups/glasses
- prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least 1 week after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone